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S E C R E T BOGOTA 001643

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SUBJECT: ANALYSIS OF FARC'S POLITICAL-MILITARY STRATEGY FOR  
2006 AND BEYOND

REF: BOGOTA 00871

Classified By: Charge d'affaires, a.i. Milton K. Drucker  
Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

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Summary  
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¶1. (C) According to Colombian security analysts, the FARC's principal short term goals are to sabotage Uribe's reelection prospects; influence Congressional elections with intimidation and funding; and energize leftist constituencies. The FARC, though weakened by the Colombian military's offensive during Uribe's term in office, will almost certainly seek to survive the next four years and bide its time hoping the military becomes extended beyond its operational limits and Plan Colombia-associated funds are exhausted. Some analysts argue that the GOC should implement a comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy to defeat the FARC that combines political and military approaches; they suggest that military action alone will be insufficient to secure GOC victory. The FARC's greatest handicap is its nearly universal rejection by the Colombian people. (See septel for Embassy assessment of the nature of the FARC and its objectives.) End Summary.

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FARC Short Term Military Strategy  
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¶2. (C) Colombian Military Joint Intelligence Center (CIC) analysts told poloff that the FARC would focus on three types of armed actions during this electoral campaign, all designed to undermine confidence in President Uribe's Democratic Security policy: 1) peripheral attacks of great impact; 2) attacks on critical infrastructure; and 3) reactivation of urban terrorism.

-- Peripheral attacks of great impact  
The FARC will continue to employ "inter-fronts" (temporary units formed from different fronts) of approximately 500-600 guerrillas to achieve mobility, flexibility, initiative, and force, that FARC fronts, companies, and mobile columns do not have.

-- Attacks on critical infrastructure

The FARC plans to attack selectively vital infrastructure, such as roadways, electrical towers, and oil pipelines. It plans to focus its attacks on areas reoccupied by government forces to convince the electorate its offensive capacity remains intact.

-- Reactivation of urban terrorism

The FARC wants to increase its attacks in urban areas, including Bogota. To accomplish this, the FARC is trying to revamp its urban militia corps to plan and carry out the attacks. According to Security and Democracy Foundation (FSD) analysts, the FARC understands that catastrophic terrorist acts have the potential to diminish popular support for Uribe (the analysts cited as an example the Atocha train station bombing in Spain March 2004).

¶3. (C) The success of even small to medium strikes, accompanied by an effective propaganda campaign, would allow the FARC to challenge Uribe's claim to have weakened the insurgents, the CIC analysts said. They explained that the perception of victory will be more important to the FARC than the actual military results, since its objective is to remind public opinion of its military strength. COLMIL-J2 analysts agreed, and asserted the attention given to tactical FARC actions by the media gives the impression that the FARC is strong and capable. They add that the FARC hopes this publicity will lead to a breakdown of consensus within the government about the effectiveness of the Democratic Security strategy and of Plan Patriota, which could help boost the left in Colombia. Moreover, the GOC's Interagency Electoral

Intelligence Center analysts say the growing visibility of leftists in Latin America motivates them to continue their armed struggle.

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FARC Short Term Political Objectives

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¶4. (C) According to Colombian National Police Intelligence (DIPOL) analysts, the FARC has four short term political strategies: penetrating community action groups in all major towns (there are an estimated 42,000 action groups that organize activities within communities); re-politicizing relations with non-governmental organizations, focusing on projects in disadvantaged zones; and further investing in propaganda efforts. The FARC hopes that these efforts, combined with intimidation of competing candidates, will reduce campaign space for traditional parties. According to the Interagency Electoral Intelligence Center (CIIE), a parallel strategy includes mobilizing university students, indigenous people, and union members.

¶5. (S) Analysts also argue that the FARC plans to use the electoral campaign to increase its political base by funding campaigns of leftist candidates at the local, departmental, and national levels. In a secret communique sent to FARC operatives in January, Supreme Commander Pedro Antonio Marin, AKA "Manuel Marulanda" or "Tirofijo," said that if candidates emerge who share common interests with the organization, the Secretariat would try to "orient the masses correctly in the

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support for (these individuals)" (reftel). Several independent analysts told poloff that the FARC would be more inclined to support presidential candidates Alvaro Leyva or Carlos Gaviria because they are the candidates closest to its ideology. In contrast, the analysts said the FARC does not seem to trust Polo Democratico Alternativo heavyweights Antonio Navarro Wolff and Gustavo Petro.

¶6. (C) CIC analysts argue that, at a minimum, the FARC wants no significant military defeats between now and the presidential inauguration. In the FARC's eyes, this would give them two valuable victories: 1) proclaim that the Democratic Security policy failed since the FARC remains

active; and 2) demonstrate to the new government the FARC's capacity to continue to threaten the political system. The FARC expects that this will generate enough public support for the resumption of peace talks under FARC conditions.

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FARC Strategy Beyond 2006  
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¶ 17. (C) The FARC, although weakened during Uribe's term, is unlikely to be defeated in the next four years. Rather, according to academic and Ministry of Defense adviser Vicente Torrijos, the insurgency will bide its time and wait until the military is extended beyond its operational limits and Plan Colombia-associated funds are exhausted. Torrijos explains the senior leadership of the FARC believes that the Colombian military offensive cannot continue indefinitely. Nor does the FARC believe the United States, especially in light of its reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq, will sustain the same level of financial support for the GOC's war against the guerrillas.

Political and Military Strategy

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¶ 18. (C) The FARC has proven itself adaptable and capable of adjusting its political-military strategy in response to the changing dynamics of Colombia's conflict, according to Semana Magazine security editor Marta Ruiz. Ruiz explained that in light of the Colombian military's offensive, the FARC is transitioning from avoiding combat to strategic actions. It has placed a premium on the use of standoff weapons such as mortars, booby traps, landmines, and improvised explosive devices. This modus operandi, which reduces the FARC's exposure, improves its survivability. Military J2 analysts suggest the FARC can survive another year of Plan Patriota, but not win the war.

¶ 19. (C) The FARC will continue to pressure the GOC to concede a new demilitarized zone ("despeje") and will likely precondition future peace talks on its establishment, according to Communist Party leader and FARC interlocutor Carlos Lozano. Lozano noted that although the FARC would not expect talks with the GOC to lead to a cessation of hostilities, it would participate with the intention of advancing its political and military objectives, as it did under former President Pastrana (1998-2002). The FARC will also continue to claim recognition as a political organization and will mount a propaganda campaign to pressure Congress to approve a prisoner exchange law and halt extradition policy. Above all, according to FSD analysts, so long as the senior leadership of the FARC remains, the insurgency will not demobilize, hand in its weapons, or end its attempts to obtain power. FSD analysts argue that a less ideologically-motivated and younger generation of guerrilla combatants, however, might pursue an alternate course of action.

¶ 10. (C) Several analysts agreed that the FARC will try to shed its "narco-terrorist" label and aspire to political power. According to DIPOL analysts, this label has significantly damaged the FARC's image and popularity. Despite the FARC's continued involvement in illicit drug trade and other illegal activities, there are plenty of examples that illustrate the insurgency's continued interest in seeking political control. To counter the "narco-terrorist" label, the Secretariat will need to devote significant resources to its domestic and international propaganda and political machine.

Organizational and Leadership Dynamics

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¶ 11. (C) According to Torrijos, there are three factors that hold the FARC together: strong senior and mid-level leadership; the strict enforcement of the organization's disciplinary code; and the centralization of authority.

However, Colombian military analysts explained that the advancement in age of many of the insurgency's senior leaders, the arrest, extradition, and/or killing of several mid-level commanders, and the promotion of ill-prepared rank-and-file guerrilla combatants to positions of authority has begun to weaken the FARC's command structure. Many FARC mid-level leaders are loyal to senior FARC Secretariat members, but may not remain loyal to replacements. Additionally, military pressure has prevented the insurgency's leadership from dedicating sufficient time to the political indoctrination of guerrilla combatants. The final result may further weaken the ideological foundation of the insurgency, and promote internal fragmentation and the dissolution of the FARC into several small criminal enterprises.

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GOC'S 2006-2010 Challenges

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¶12. (C) The GOC must implement a more comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy that, while focused on defeating the FARC on the battlefield, also addresses the political, economic, social, and cultural problems that continue to perpetrate its existence, according to Ruiz. FSD Director Alfredo Rangel told poloff that the GOC should continue to attack the symptoms of the conflict -- the FARC -- while seeking simultaneously to confront its causes, which he described as social and economic inequality, poor distribution of land, and poverty. Rangel argued that the Colombian military should adjust its strategy to conceptualize the enemy for what it is -- a self-funded, autonomous, communist insurgency that is driven by a desire for political power -- rather than nothing more than a group of "delinquents" and "bandits." Rangel explained that this failure to "know your enemy" and to understand how the FARC operates has led to the prolongation of the conflict. Moreover, greater efforts should be made to freeze the financial assets of the insurgency to neutralize its leadership.

¶13. (C) Analysts made the following suggestions for what the GOC should do to implement a comprehensive strategy against the FARC:

-- Continue to engage the senior and mid-level FARC leadership militarily, while targeting psychological operations against mid-level commanders rather than focusing solely on convincing the rank-and-file to defect.

-- Curtail the FARC's access to financial resources. This could be accomplished by continuing to attack the insurgency's primary source of revenue -- illicit drug crops -- and by gaining control of the group's financial assets. If this is not done, the revenues derived from the FARC's ever-diversifying involvement in illicit activities may give it an advantage over its economically-strapped and resource-poor enemy, the GOC, according to FSD analysts.

-- Improve social services and infrastructure in rural communities and in those areas formerly under guerrilla control. By improving the socio-economic opportunities and living conditions in which rural inhabitants reside, the government may diminish support for the FARC, since 90 percent of the insurgency's recruits are drawn from this disaffected group.

-- Maintain military pressure and improve operational mobility to prevent the FARC from regrouping and expanding. While the military will be able to sustain a moderate level of operations, recent gains could be reversed if the pressure is not sustained. According to FSD analysts, the government is spending enough to keep the rebels from advancing, but Colombia needs to take a strategic leap toward eliminating them, an endeavor that will take at least 30 percent more manpower.

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Comment  
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¶14. (C) The FARC apparently regards recent electoral victories of leftist candidates Latin America as a sign that the political winds have shifted in its favor (reftel). The FARC's abysmal approval ratings, which hover under 2 percent in the major population centers, however, suggest that its strategy of using fear and intimidation to convince "the masses" remains a losing tactic. Moreover, with steady progress in reducing kidnappings and narcotics trade, the finances to support the FARC's efforts are ebbing, albeit slowly. (See septel for Embassy assessment of the nature of the FARC and its objectives.)

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